

Individual-level evaluative bibliometrics – the politics of its use and abuse

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The last five years have seen an upsurge of attempts to measure individual research performance by using bibliometric indicators. The demand for such individual-level evaluative bibliometrics has dramatically increased in the context of management reforms that make managers responsible for research performance. ‘Amateur bibliometrics’ – the unreflected use of ready-made indicators offered by the owners of bibliometric databases – abounds. At the same time, bibliometricians try to develop indicators that can be applied to individuals without always paying sufficient attention to the methodological and ethical problems involved. There is an obvious danger that this process will be accelerated as policy and management of science ‘buy into’ this new development.

These trends raise methodological, ethical and political questions. The methodological question to be addressed by bibliometricians concerns the conditions under which individual-level bibliometrics can produce information that is sufficiently valid and reliable to be used in evaluations. The political question of how expectations for evaluations can be met without distorting the science system needs to be jointly answered by the bibliometrics community, science policy and managers of research organisations. Finally, there is also the question whether the bibliometrics community should develop a guideline of standards and a code of ethics, a practice that is common for most professions.

We think that these questions need to be urgently discussed, and propose to hold a plenary session on the political and ethical issues related to individual-level bibliometrics at the STI conference in September 2013. Our aim is to initiate a discussion that leads to policy recommendations about the use and interpretations of individual-level bibliometric evaluations and to a code of conduct for the bibliometric profession.

Presentations:

- (1) Brief report on the ISSI 2013 plenary on methodological aspects of individual-level bibliometrics (Wolfgang Glänzel, ECOOM, KU Leuven)
- (2) Experiences with individual level bibliometrics in research management in the last decade (Paul Wouters, CWTS, Leiden University)

- (3) Decision situations in science policy and management and the need for individual-level bibliometric evaluations (Marc Luwel, Hercules Foundation, Belgium)
- (4) Ethical Aspects of Doing Evaluative Bibliometrics (Jochen Gläser, ZTG, TU Berlin)